Amendments to the Claims

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

Claims 1-14 (canceled)

Claim 15 (Previously amended) A method for packaging and stabilizing a food product, comprising the steps of:

providing an open container comprising a laminate including a base layer formed from a liquid absorbing material, at least one outer layer comprising a first polymeric material and facing the outside of said container, and at least one inner layer comprising a second polymeric material and facing the inside of said container;

adding a food product to the inside of the open container under non-aseptic conditions;

closing the container opening and thereby sealing the inside of the container from exposure to external microbial attack;

exposing the outside of the container to moist heat at a temperature between about 90°C and about 121°C;

maintaining said exposure to said moist heat for a time sufficient to heat said container and said food product to a temperature providing stabilization of said food product while simultaneously retaining a level of dimensional stability and mechanical strength in said container for transport and subsequent storage of said container;

thereafter allowing the container and the food product contained therein to cool.

Claim 16 (Previously added) A method as claimed in claim 15, wherein said polymeric material in said inner and outer layers may be the same or different and each has a melting point sufficiently high to withstand exposure to said moist heat in a manner consistent with said dimensional stability and mechanical strength of said sealed container.

Claim 17 (Previously presented) A method as claimed in claim 15, wherein said outer layer polymeric material is selected from the group consisting of polypropylene, oriented polypropylene, metalized oriented polypropylene, high density polyethylene, metalized high density polyethylene, linear low density polyethylene, polyethylene terephthalate, metalized polyester and amorphous polyester, and said inner layer polymeric material is selected from the group consisting of polypropylene, high density polyethylene, linear low density polyethylene, polyethylene terephthalate, and amorphous polyester.

Claim 18 (Previously presented) A method as claimed in claim 15, wherein said exposing and maintaining steps are carried out at a sufficient temperature and for a sufficient time to stabilize said food product via sterilization.

Claim 19 (Previously presented) A method as claimed in claim 15, wherein said exposing and maintaining steps are carried out at a sufficient temperature and for a sufficient time to stabilize said food product via pasteurization.

Claim 20 (Previously presented) A method as claimed in claim 15, wherein said base layer of said container comprises paper or cardboard.

Claim 21 (Previously presented) A method as claimed in claim 15, wherein said laminate additionally includes a barrier layer between said base layer and said inner layer, said barrier layer comprising a material selected from the group consisting of aluminum, an aluminum oxide coating, a silica coating, ethylene/vinyl alcohol, polyvinyl alcohol, metalized oriented polyester and metalized oriented polypropylene.

Claim 22 (Previously presented) A method as claimed in claim 15, wherein said laminate additionally includes an intermediate layer between said base layer and said outer layer, said intermediate layer comprising a polymeric material selected from the group consisting of polypropylene, low density polyethylene, medium density polyethylene, high density polyethylene and amorphous polyester.

Claim 23 (Previously presented) A method as claimed in claim 15, wherein said laminate additionally includes a coating adjacent one or both sides of the barrier layer, said coating being selected from the group consisting of an adhesion plastic, a heated sealable plastic, a primer and a lacquer.

Claim 24 (Previously presented) A method as claimed in claim 15, wherein said outer layer and said inner layer comprise a polyester.

Claim 25 (Previously presented) A method as claimed in claim 15, wherein said outer layer and said inner layer comprise a polymeric material including polyethylene terephthalate and from 1.5 to 2.5 weight percent of glycol/cyclohexanedimethanol.

Claim 26 (Previously presented) A method as claimed in claim 15, wherein said article has an F_0 value between 3 and 18.

Claim 27 (Previously presented) A method as claimed in claim 15, wherein said laminate additionally includes a barrier layer between said base layer and said inner layer, said barrier layer comprising a material selected from the group consisting of aluminum, an aluminum oxide coating, a silica coating, ethylene/vinyl alcohol, polyvinyl alcohol, metalized oriented polyester and metalized oriented polypropylene; and
wherein said laminate additionally includes a coating adjacent one or both sides of the barrier layer, said coating being selected from the group consisting of an adhesion plastic, a heated sealable plastic, a primer and a lacquer.

Claim 28 (Previously presented) A method as claimed in claim 15, wherein said laminate additionally includes a barrier layer between said base layer and said inner layer, said barrier layer comprising a material selected from the group consisting of aluminum, an aluminum oxide coating, a silica coating, ethylene/vinyl alcohol, polyvinyl alcohol, metalized oriented polyester and metalized oriented polypropylene; and
wherein said laminate additionally includes a coating adjacent one or both sides of the barrier layer, said coating being selected from the group consisting of an adhesion plastic, a heated sealable plastic, a primer and a lacquer;

wherein said exposing and maintaining steps are carried out at a sufficient temperature and for a sufficient time to stabilize said food product via sterilization; and

wherein said container has an F_o value between 3 and 18.

Claim 29 (New) A method for packaging and stabilizing a food product, consisting essentially of the steps of:

providing an open container;

adding a food product to the inside of the open container under non-aseptic conditions;

closing the container opening and thereby sealing the inside of the container from exposure to external microbial attack;

exposing the outside of the container to moist heat at a temperature between about 90°C and about 121°C;

maintaining said exposure to said moist heat for a time sufficient to heat said container and said food product to a temperature providing stabilization of said food product while simultaneously retaining a level of dimensional stability and mechanical strength in said container for transport and subsequent storage of said container;

thereafter allowing the container and the food product contained therein to cool;

wherein said exposing and maintaining steps are carried out at a sufficient temperature and for a sufficient time to stabilize said food product via sterilization, said container having an F_o value between 3 and 18; and

wherein said laminate consists essentially of:

a base layer formed from a liquid absorbing material;

at least one outer layer consisting essentially of a first polymeric material and facing the outside of said container;

at least one inner layer consisting essentially of a second polymeric material and facing the inside of said container;

a barrier layer between said base layer and said inner layer, said barrier layer selected from the group consisting of aluminum, an aluminum oxide coating, a silica coating, ethylene/vinyl alcohol, polyvinyl alcohol, metalized oriented polyester and metalized oriented polypropylene; and

a coating adjacent one or both sides of the barrier layer, said coating being selected from the group consisting of an adhesion plastic, a heated sealable plastic, a primer and a lacquer.